[Dunnell #14]

Mass. 1938-9 6/30/39 Mr. G.O. Dunnell - Hay, Grain and Feed Man Paper 14

[JUL 10 1939?]

STATE MASSACHUSETTS

NAME OF WORKER ROBERT WILDER

ADDRESS NORTHFIELD MASSACHUSETTS

SUBJECT LIVING LORE

NAME OF INFORMANT G.O. DUNNELL

ADDRESS NORTHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

Name: Robert Wilder

Title: Living Lore

Assignment: Northfield

Topic: G.O. Dunnell - Hay, Grain and Feed Man Paper 14

Jim Carter, local potentate of a well known secret fraternity had been chatting with us in Mr. Dunnell's office. Jim's a good hearted soul, but pretty vain of his eminence in the “lodge.” After boasting half an hour about his various “official” honors, Jim departed, to Mr. Dunnell's obvious relief.

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“I don't take much stock in secret societies - men dressing themselves up like knights, or kings, or something. And learning a lot of stuff and reciting it to each other, so's they'll know ‘em when they meet ‘em in Africy, or somewheres. They shake hands with each other just so, too, so's they'll know who's who in the dark. And hang on to themselves asif they had the bellyache as a sign of something or other.

“I ain't saying that it ain't a good thing to belong to a few societies. That it don't help business. And that's why most of ‘em do belong — not because they think that there's anything in the tripe. They know they ain't.

“I understand that George Washington and Benjamin Franklin and all those fellers belonged to the Masons once. But that was because they was scheming to chase out the British, or had some other scheme up their sleeves that they had to have an organization for. But now days we got a good enough government. They ain't no need to change it. And I ain't sure that secret societies ought to be allowed. We're supposed to have free speech and a free press, and 2 the right to peaceable assemble. And we can bear arms if we want to, so's not to hurt the chances of having a good milishy. But we can't bear concealed arms without a permit. And how do we know whether the secret societies ain't violating the law?

“Sure, they say they are only in it to help one another, and look after widders and orphans of members. But ain't that all covered by the government? Maybe there was need for that sort of stuff once. But they ain't no more. And it looks to [be?] [me?] that it can be made dangerous. What if you agree to help out a brother under certain circumstances, and that brother and some of the other brethern are maybe runnin' a racket on the side, you got to help ‘em out, if they put it up to you right, else your oath ain't a bit of good. If your word is good, maybe you're helping out something that you wouldn't help if you knew what it was. But because you belong to the society you don't have to understand nothing, see?

“This idea of one gang standing together against everybody else and helping each other out, ain't, to my way of thinking, the best thing for this country. I'd like to see every blamed one of ‘em busted up. They ain't supposed to be no special classes of nobles in this country. And if that applies to real nobles why don't it apply to fake ones?

“No, I ain't ever been turned down by no society.

“Sam Alexander tried to get me in one a couple of times, but not me. I ain't got any use for them.

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“Say, speakin' about Sam Alexander. He most made me drop dead the other day. Never had such a surprise in my life. He come in and paid me forty dollars that he's owed me since God knows when. I'd dunned him, and my wife dunned him. But it didn't do no good. He didn't have a cent that you could attach, so it wan't no good to sue him.

“I tackled him once up in the town hall when he was keeping time for the WPA. I asked him what he ever come to me and got that stuff for. He was raising chickens and he told me that he would pay me when he sold the chickens. But when he sold ‘em he had other use for the money and I didn't get any.

“I thought you was a man of your word,’ I says. 'so I let you have the feed. You told me you would pay me. But you shouldn't have ought to have done that. You knew that you couldn't pay. Why didn't you go on the welfare?’ ‘And let the whole town share in your support? 't wan't fair for you to come to me and ask me to take on the whole burden of your welfare. You knew you couldn't pay when you come to me,’ I says, ‘And yet you come and told me you would pay me when you knew you couldn't. I'd a thought a lot more of you,’ I says, ‘If you had come and asked me to give it to you. And I might have done it. But now I need the money and you won't give it to me.”

“The thing that got me was the way he'd talked to my women folks. They were out collectin' one day and they stopped in at 4 Sam's. Sam come out and give ‘em hell. He chased ‘em off his place. I told Sam about it and he said he did get mad and say things that he shouldn't have. But I didn't get no money. [Nor I didn't get no money.] Nor I didn't expect to. Then in walks Sam and pays me my money. Yes, I'd sent him a bill after I heard that he'd collected something from his accident. And I added interest to it, for I thought I might as well. But I didn't get the interest. Surprised me, though. For I'd a sold the bill for five dollars.

“I knew Tom McCue had a bill against Sam for three or four loads of hay that he never expected to get, so I told Tom about it, for I knew he couldn't read, and might not have heard that Sam had some money. I told him he better hurry on down there before Sam got his money all spent.

“Tom's the feller I offered to sell my bill against Sam to one time he come in to see what he could do towards getting his pay for the hay. He wouldn't buy. But he offered to sell me his for five dollars. And I guess I was a fool I didn't take it.

“Tom went down to see Sam. And Sam said that he want going to pay him nothing that the hay was no good. ‘No good, hey?’ says Tom. ‘Well, it was good enough the first time so that you wanted another load. And that load was good enough so that you wanted another, and so it went to the last load,’ he says. ‘Now,’ he says, ‘I didn't come all the way down here for nothing. If I don't get my money, 5 I'm going to try something else. I won't be back. But I'd give ye a fair offer now. Never mind the last load, we'll forget it. But you give me a check for twenty five dollars!’ Sam said he didn't have no money. That he didn't get much more than a hundred dollars anyway, and that it was all gone. ‘All right,’ says Tom, ‘Let's see your old battle axe of a wife. Tell her I'll call the whole bill square for twenty five dollars now, or I'll get a lawyer into it. ‘ Sam went into the house and damned if he didn't come

back with a check for twenty-five dollars. And that was that. It's a shame though. Sam could make a good living on that place of his if he'd only work.

“Sam used to sell papers. He made good money at that. But did you ever hear of how he went into the business of selling unbreadable lamp chimneys from door to door?

“Course, that was in the days when they used kerosene lamps, and the ordinary glass chimneys used to break, so a real unbreakable one was a good thing.

“What happened was that some fellows come ‘round in a buggy and got Sam to be their local agent. They showed him how they could throw a lamp chimney on the floor and it wouldn't break. And they taught him a line of sales talk to go with the demonstration.

“He was supposed to knock at the door with the lamp chimney in his hand. When the door was opened he was to let the chimney slip in 6 a certain way so that it would fall on the floor inside. And, if it was done right, he could close a sale pretty fast, for the chimneys weren't a lot more expensive than those they could buy at the store.

“Sam tried it out. And he got along swell. He got along so well that he got over-confident. One afternoon, he breezes in to a place right after the woman had swept her floor after dinner, and was figuring on resting for a while. The door was open so Sam steps right in, ‘Good afternoon Madam,’ he says. ‘I have here an unbreadable unbreakable lamp chimney that you shouldn't be without.’ The woman glared at him, and was going to tell him to get out, when he flips his wrist in the usual way and sent the chimney spinning to the floor. But it didn't [cuite?] quite hit the floor. It hit a stove leg and broke into 'most a million little pieces all over that woman's clean floor. Sam was so astonished that he stood there and gawped. The woman started to crown him with a mop. But when she saw his face she begun to laugh. And the laugh woke Sam up and sent him scuttling out of there before the woman changed her mind again. Last he seen the woman was sitting in a chair hanging on to her sides, so maybe she enjoyed sweeping those bits of glass off the floor.

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“No, ‘course the chimneys wan't unbreakable glass. They was just ordinary chimneys. The trick was in the way they throwed it. Guess it was one of the first high pressure sales ideas. And about as valuable for the public good as the other high pressure sales methods are.

“You ask Sam sometime if he ever heard of unbreakable lamp chimneys.”